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ABSTRACT

The Wingspread Conference on the Social Studies, sponsored by the Naticnal Association of Independent Schools in June 1968, has offered important leadership in bringing history and social science education into the 20th century. A significant departure from other innovative efforts within the profession was the heavy involvement of classroom teachers. Some highly useful ideas for bringing about needed changes in social studies education also emerged. Briefly stated, some of these are: 1) we must help youth to seek the truth about modern life... face it more freely, and change it more fully, rather than continue to indoctrinate through rote memorization of facts; 2) classroom work will have meaning only if it is related to community commitment outside the classroom; 3) the informed public opinion that could act as a check on the irresponsible exercise of power by the United States Government does not yet exist. The classroom must critically confront the realities of nuclear power, the military industrial complex, etc; and, 4) Black studies are not needed merely or especially for blacks, but for whites. Wingspread also called for the establishment of a clearinghouse and newsletter for disseminating information about innovation in secondary social studies. Some major revisions in teacher training are needed in order to accomplish these objectives. (JLB)

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New Dimensions

for

History Teaching in the Schools

SP 000 804

John A. Scott

November 10, 1969

The crisis through which we live has had a deep impact upon the educational system. It would be no exaggeration to say that the social sciences lie at the very center of the storm. Students feel, and give passionate voice to a deep concern over the chasm that separates academic history and classroom social science from life and experience as they know it. On the one side, they charge, we find dry, irrelevant, and impersonal facts, heavy, hidebound, dogmatic texts. On the other side, a multitude of burning human problems clamor for attention, comprehension, and solution.

Many teachers share the concerns of the young people. Teachers, across the country, are living in a turmoil of confusion concerning the purposes that ought to inform and inspire their teaching; that should guide them in replacing the older forms, the older procedures and the older substance of learning.

The problem can be stated in a nutshell. The academic community, the community of teachers and students, finds a glaring contradiction between the urgent needs of twentieth century society on the one side and the obsolescent practices and traditions of the social science profession on the other.

It is, I think, not at all unfair to charge that we as historians and social scientists have reacted to this crisis much too slowly and quite inadequately. We have reacted far more slowly than the mathematicians, the scientists and the linguists; even before the Russians threw out Sputnik these people were moving ahead to redesign the teaching of math, science, and language. This is

paradoxical, because the most fundamental and the most critical problems of our time -- problems of war and peace, racism, poverty and civil liberties -- lie mainly within the realm of the social sciences. And exactly how much have we as yet done to give leadership in the creation of a social science discipline that is relevant to the great issues which our young people now face?

It may not be out of place at this point to state a little more fully some of the elements of this crisis which, we feel, presents a supreme challenge to the social sciences both as independent disciplines and as cooperating elements within the general body of the scientific community.

A growing number of our young people are convinced of the truth of the following propositions.

The American people and the people of the entire world face in our era a crisis of survival. Mankind is threatened by a number of separate but related perils. Among these we might mention:

(a) The advanced countries, with the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. in the lead, have achieved a capacity of mass destruction through both atomic and biological warfare threatening the survival of the human race itself. From the specifically American aspect of the matter, the pyramiding of expenditures on new and insane forms of weapons enhances our own domestic crisis and creates deepening international complications.

(b) There is a gulf between rich and poor in the U.S. dramatized by the ghetto rebellions and poor people's marches of recent years. The racial and class strife engendered by social and economic injustice threatens to tear this country into pieces.

(c) Massive environmental intrusion, in which the mammoth American corporations and the Government itself are the arch villains, threatens the destruction of our natural environment, the exhaustion of our natural resources, the progressive pollution of food, water, and air. Population expansion, both here and abroad is out of control; it threatens at the present rate of escalation sure catastrophe in the 21st century.

As social scientists and historians we have failed to give decisive leadership to the community in exploring this crisis, in debating its dimensions, and in finding roads to a solution. Twelve years after Sputnik we still have only the haziest ideas concerning our answers to this challenge; concerning the role of the social sciences in the nation's schools and the new dimensions of the history that we are called upon to create and to teach. We are still sunk in our dogmatic slumbers. As Professor Franklin Patterson of

Tufts wrote in a recent book on the Revolution in Teaching:[1]

> "For the most part the present social studies curriculum is simply obsolescent. It has remained unchanged for forty years or more. Immense changes in human society and knowledge . . . have occurred without compensatory development in the social studies curriculum."

This situation grows more intolerable with each passing day. Some members of the profession, it is true, have tried to develop new approaches and to bring aid to their beleaguered high school colleagues. Professor Asher's History Education Project at the University of Indiana is a noteworthy example. Programs such as this face many obstacles; starved of federal funds they develop too slowly and on too small a scale. And there are often real personal difficulties that arise from the inexperience of the college personnel who head up these programs. The college historian or social scientist in many cases has had little or no actual experience of teaching at the high school level. He is therefore hamstrung at the outset by a lack of those indispensable insights that can come only from day to day contact with youth in the school. Difficult problems of new dimensions of social science teaching at the high school level cannot be solved without the active participation, indeed leadership, of the classroom teachers themselves. The role of the college professional is important but we may think of it as a secondary one -- to help the teachers themselves to initiate and carry through the revolution in approach and in materials that is so desperately needed.

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[1] Revolution in Teaching, ed. Alfred de Grazia and David A. Sohn (New York: Bantam Books, 1964)

The decisive factor that, up till now, has been missing has been the active and independent participation of high school teachers themselves in the creation of new social studies dimensions. The reasons for this apathy are not particularly mysterious. The high school historian has himself been trained in the old tradition and carries its intellectual burden around with him. Many of us are like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner -- doomed to spend our days telling an old tale to whatever unfortunate captive audience we can corner. The high school historian finds it hard to move in new directions even when he wants to: he is overwhelmed with the pragmatic pressures of day to day work, and lacks completely the relative freedom of his college colleague -- freedom without which, as we all know, creative and thoughtful work is next to impossible. Sabbatical leaves, at the high school level, are rarer than the proverbial hen's teeth. Summer refresher courses alleviate the situation partially and sometimes not at all. High school teachers often experience a curious lack of relevance in the college courses which they take. They may return home inspired and refreshed, or they may return more confused and discouraged than when they began.

What we note at this point is that the high school teacher is now moving into that position of leadership which is to be expected of him. He is himself beginning to formulate his own ideas concerning the new dimensions of history teaching in the schools and to conduct his own debate on high school educational policy. A notable contribution in stimulating this process was made by the Wingspread Conference held at Racine, Wisconsin in June 1968.

Wingspread is the name of a magnificent house built by Frank Lloyd Wright, and it is now the conference center of the Johnson Foundation. The Wingspread Conference on the Social Studies was called by the National Association of Independent Schools, which in the past few years has become seriously alarmed by the national crisis in the teaching of the social studies. Some forty teachers came together at Wingspread for a week's discussion of the new dimensions of high school social studies in the third week of June 1968. These were men and women from every section of the country. Some were young, some old, some experienced teachers, some novices; some were specialists in one or other subject area, some were specialists in none.

The week's work produced a series of reports and an overall body of Preliminary Findings. These were circulated, during the academic year 1968-1969, from coast to coast among the member schools. They provided a basis for discussions in individual schools, in local meetings of several schools, in regional and national education conferences. The findings thus submitted to the profession at large received serious examination and some hard-hitting criticism.

As a result of this wider discussion a small writing group came together again at Wisconsin in June 1969. The criticisms, suggestions, and recommendations coming in from the field were examined. A new report was put together which will be published shortly, and, we hope, will be disseminated widely not only in the private and parochial schools but in the public schools as well. This dissemination, we

hope, will produce yet another round of debate, and will stimulate wider numbers of high school teachers to articulate their problems, needs, and direction.

Already, even at this stage, some highly useful and interesting ideas have emerged from the Wingspread process and from the report that is currently being prepared for publication. I am going to touch upon, in the time that remains, just a few of these ideas, with regard to the new dimensions of the social studies.

(A) The Role of the Social Science Teacher

Social scientists and historians are not magicians with wands to wave around wherewith to exorcise the frightful evils and dangers of the modern world. The role of social science teachers, Wingspread pointed out, is modest and still important. They come to the situation armed with knowledge; they can provide young people with the materials for a study of the real world. They can help youth grasp the human predicament more fully, help them prepare themselves more adequately to confront and to control the society which they inherit.

The teacher is skeptical when he hears this. "What's so new?" he may ask, "Isn't this what we've been trying to do all along?"

Well, maybe yes and maybe no. In principle the task of high school social studies has been to teach the truth about society. In practice we have not been as truthful as we might wish. The traditional purpose of history

teaching in the nation's schools has been one of indoctrination -- the inculcation of an uncritical loyalty to the national flag, the national government, and the national leadership -- loyalty to a quasi-official version of the American lifestyle. The propagandistic purpose of historical education became pronounced in the years following the Civil War when millions of children, the sons and daughters of immigrants, flocked into the metropolitan schools.

If the objective was propagandistic, the method was fact and rote through the medium of the text and class recitation.[2] The accent was on political and military history, with a strong dose of iconography. These traditions have died hard; they have become both embalmed and immortalized in the high school texts. The texts, it is true, have grown more sophisticated as the years have passed; many are today jazzed up quite attractively with inks of different color, color photographs and color maps, political cartoons. Let us add that the spirit and basic purpose of these books have undergone little change. Controversial topics are avoided, the critical approach is non-

[2] Memorization was considered a part of enlightened pedagogy. See the case of the Boston English High School which required students to memorize the entire United States Constitution. Michael B. Katz, The Irony of Early School Reform (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 127.

topics are avoided, the critical approach is non-existent. Social, economic and intellectual history have made only moderate inroads upon the dead mass of traditional material. There is no such thing as a nationally marketed text that presents a true and candid picture of slavery and racism in the U.S.A. There is never the hint of a suggestion that the Federal Government may have committed any minor errors, let alone major blunders or crimes.

None of this will do any more. Precisely because our teachers are beginning - just beginning - to throw out these texts and to experiment with a whole series of alternatives, fresh and fundamental problems arise. Teachers without texts confront in a totally new form the question: what ought I to teach, and why? Here the Wingspread answer was disarming in its simplicity and significance. "You must abandon," said Wingspread, "the very conception of rote and of indoctrination. You must help youth to seek the truth about modern life; you must help them undergo the discipline of learning so that they may better understand the world, face it more freely, and change it more fully."

There's another, and opposite reaction to this viewpoint. "Goodness," a reasonable pedagogue might exclaim, "are we going to convert the social science classroom into a glorified and permanent session on current affairs?"

Well, we certainly feel strongly that the point of departure for the social studies classroom must be the present and the problems of the present. What, after all, concerns youth more than this, and where else, after all, can they start? But to say that the present is our starting point is not the same as saying that we will never go beyond the present. The problems that we are dealing with have deep historical roots. Precisely because this is so we are pushed back into the past to find the roots of modern phenomena and the key to their meaning.

Surely this is one thing that all of us as historians can agree upon. The key to the understanding of all social institutions, all ideas, all practices, is to study the way in which these things have developed and evolved. The law of life is change, and the key to understanding life, to reaching its inner essence, is to trace the course of growth and change. Show the young person how history illuminates the meaning of life and modern existence. He will come to understand its fascination, seeing not only that it is humanly and intellectual beautiful but also indispensable.

For the rest, we will cheerfully admit that history which cannot be pressed into service to illuminate our present predicament and help provide a guide to action, has a purely antiquarian interest. Clio's home is an attic full of rubbish. Only some of it is relevant for us right now.

(B) The Classroom and the Community

The teachers who came to Wingspread examined, not only the role of the teacher in the classroom, but the role of the classroom itself in the life of a young person. There was a feeling that this classroom must be rescued from the cloistered isolation into which it has been pushed. The student revolt against this classroom lies precisely in this, that the rituals that go on there bear no discernible relationship to anything else that happens in the experience of youth.

In some fields of endeavor there has always been a clear and discernible relationship between what a youth does in the classroom, the studio, or the shop, and what he wants or plans to do outside of this academic setting. In the arts and in many vocational fields, a youth learns skills that he will practice in the outside world, and that will be useful in that world. But this has not been true of the social studies. The relationship of such studies to life, at the high school level, has too often been of the haziest kind. Usually we have dubbed it "citizenship education".

But how on earth do you learn citizenship in a classroom? The teacher may have an answer to this question; the youth do not. Classroom talk, usually Pollyanna, about civic responsibilities, voting, civil liberties, and so on, has little or no relationship to the hard realities of political life, political organ-

ization, and political struggle.

Here, Wingspread set forth a principle of education that can provide all of us with food for thought. Classroom work, said the Wingspread people, will have meaning if it is related to community commitment outside the classroom. There must, in other words, be a clear and discernible relation between the academic work and the solution of a social problem which the student is confronting, or seeks to confront, in real life.

Here, we are not talking about visits to art galleries, fire stations, or archaeological sites, important though all this may be. We are talking about the type of leadership that the classroom teacher gives his students as participating members of the community. Wingspread came to the conclusion, radical as it may sound, that there can be no impassioned and disciplined study of history without commitment. Such commitment provides a motive for study and illuminates the very meaning of academic discipline itself for young people.

As an example, take the draft law. There is no doubt that this is an important and pervasive influence in the life of adolescent youth. The relevance of studying this law and understanding it is almost self-evident to the youth of both sexes as they approach the school leaving age. Let us bring Form #100 which all male youth must fill out at age 18, into the classroom --

this is bringing life into the classroom with a vengeance. At once a host of real problems spring up:

> Ought I to register for a peacetime draft? What will be the consequences if I don't?
>
> Form #100 asks me to list any physical or psychological difficulties that I have, that might militate against effective performance of military service. Ought I to undergo a medical and psychiatric examination right now, before registering? If so, who will pay for it, and where will I find competent help?(no minor matter in many small town communities!)
>
> Form #100 asks me if I am a C.O. How do I know? What is a C.O.?

The discussion of these obvious and preliminary questions leads to a host of even more basic ones?

> Is a peacetime draft constitutional?
>
> How did it begin, and when? What did the Founding Fathers think about obligatory military service at the Federal level?
>
> Is a Federal Draft constitutional even in time of war? What are the authorities for believing that it is, and what authorities speak against it?
>
> If the Draft is constitutional, by what authority is the Federal Government entitled to use men for military service overseas?
>
> Is war an appropriate form of national defense?
>
> Is this particular war (whatever this particular war may be) moral or constitutional?
>
> What is undeclared war? If undeclared war is unconstitutional, is it then <u>per se</u> a form of crime?
>
> How can the draft be abolished?

We need not point out to an audience of historians, that none of these questions can be considered, absolutely none,

without a careful examination of the American Constitution and its historical development. We are immediately deep in history simply because the students cannot do without it if they are to find answers to questions which have been posed -- in and by the community.

The girls can be interested in all this, not because they will go to war, but because they may wish to help boy friends in perplexity. But it would not matter even if they were not. We could get into a similar fundamental discussion through a consideration of the abortion and other birth control laws. Obviously these concern young women as immediately as the draft law concerns young men.

(C) War and Peace Studies

The Wingspread Conference stressed the need for experimentation with courses of a radically new kind. It will scarcely come as a surprise to this audience that a recommendation was made for more African and more Asian studies. Equally significant was the stress which Wingspread placed upon what was called "War and Peace Studies".

American foreign policy, reasoned the teachers, is by and large the exercise of irresponsible power. The informed public opinion that could act as a check on such power does not yet exist. The shaping of American international policies demands an educated electorate

with a broad understanding of the realities of the present world order. Here the stress must be upon the crucial role that the American people can play, and particularly the young, in the struggle for a peaceful world.

Ignorance of international realities has become a suicidal luxury, ever since the first atomic explosion shed its baleful glare. The new era requires a new kind of international education. The classroom must tackle and confront the realities of nuclear power, the problems of disarmament, the role of the American arms lobby in national life, Third World struggles, the nature of the Soviet bloc, coexistence, the international role of the C.I.A.

(D) Black Studies

The Wingspread Conference turned its attention, also, to Black Studies. Here, also, I think that it may have had something original to say.

Black Studies have hitherto played a dual role; they have provided Black people with a fuller sense of ethnic identity and dignity which will serve them in good stead in their continuing struggle for equal rights; and Black Studies, to some degree, have sensitized the white community to the meaning and the agony of the Black experience. But the full impact of all of this upon the

writing of American history has yet to be felt.

There has, to be sure, been a great deal of activity around the issue. Interracial pictures have appeared in the texts; enrichment materials have hastily been put together by boards of education and made available to teachers in pamphlet form (here the Washington, D.C. educational authorities, represented here by our friend Larry Cuban, were pioneers). Publishers have rushed in with a flood of material on Black life and history specifically designed for the youth market. New Black courses have been instituted.

All of this marks only a beginning in a serious approach to Black studies. Wingspread pointed out that the Black experience is more than just an important aspect of American life -- it is in fact central to understanding American history at all. Black labor was crucial in laying the foundations of this country and in providing the capital without which American technology could not have developed. Since those early days Black people have played a crucial role in every phase and at every point of national development. For this reason the racial crisis cannot be understood, let alone coped with, without a restudy and a rewriting of the American past. We need to investigate afresh, for example, the ways in which the slave system and slave law have conditioned the American social structure,

American behavior and thought, the American legal system itself.

Black studies, Wingspread suggested, are not needed merely or especially for Blacks. They are needed for everyone and above all for whites. This is obviously an area where the historian may make a much needed contribution.

One small example of what I am talking about comes to mind in connection with some recent trials. In slavery days an alleged fugitive from the South, when arrested and brought before a magistrate, was denied the right to be defended by an attorney, was denied the right to speak, and was not permitted to defend himself. Recently in both Federal and State courts, in the cases of Bobby Seale and Martin Sostre, black men have been denied the right to lawyers of their own choice, have not been permitted to defend themselves, and have been gagged and shackled when they tried to speak. The historian can help us to understand what is going on here. Does such treatment constitute a form of slavery and a continuation of the old practice with regard to the fugitive?

After dealing with new dimensions of history teaching Wingspread moved on to discuss the new methods needed to accomplish these goals. There is no time to go into this aspect of the subject here. It is enough to say that the conference was concerned about the absence of a national clearing house through which teachers can begin to inform themselves about the innovations which,

collectively, they are now undertaking in the nation's schools on the secondary level.

Wingspread called, therefore, for the establishment of such a clearing house and for the publication of a newsletter that would devote itself precisely to the question of experimental innovation and the exchange of ideas about this between teachers in different parts of the country. Wingspread also called for greater initiative on the part of the secondary school teachers in identifying their new needs, and, through this clearing house organization, to take steps to see that the appropriate materials get written, edited, or otherwise provided for.

Following this recommendation the National Association of Teachers in Independent Schools is moving to establish such a clearing house. Here, hopefully, it can join forces with other teachers' organizations and institutions that have begun to move in this direction and have a common interest in developing such a center.

Wingspread also dealt with a question which is of immediate concern to Professor Asher -- the kind of training that a teacher will have to have if he is to be truly effective in carrying out these difficult new tasks of high school history teaching. Wingspread made no bones about the fact that it envisions, and calls for, a revolution in teacher training in order to accomplish its objectives. The training of the history and social science teacher, we felt, must be placed at the very heart of the modern

university and should absorb a major portion of its time and energies.

Implementation of the Wingspread objectives will depend in part on the speed with which a new generation of history teachers can be trained. We do not believe that this can be done effectively until the gulf separating the high school teachers and the college historians has been done away with. The working out of a new approach to the training of the history teacher needs to be done in close cooperation with the high schools and their students.

Professor Asher's History Education Project has as its major concern the working out of fresh approaches to the training and preparation of history teachers. The Advisory Committee that heads this Project seems, from the list that I have before me, to be rather topheavy with professional historians who have had little or no experience in high school teaching. One would think that the absence of people with such qualifications might jeopardize the work of this Committee. One notes, too, that both high school and college students are excluded from representation in the leadership of this Project. This, it seems to me, may weaken the Project's efforts, given the extraordinary perceptiveness of today's youth with regard to the task which they want the educational system to fulfill.

J.A.S.

November, 1969